

# Behind the Scenes: Storytelling and Group Process

One of the great ironies of designing highly participatory, emergent processes is that they require a lot of work. We walk through and [practice design scenarios](#). We [scrutinize every last detail](#), from the wording of each question to the [layout of the physical space](#). It's exhausting, but it's also incredibly fun and gratifying, and the results more than make it worth it.

We've written a [rough description of our design process](#), but the best way to understand it is to experience it firsthand. However, we now have some short video clips from the design process of one of our projects, and it might offer a glimpse into what we do, how we think, and how we design.

For the past year, we've been working with the [Delta Conservancy](#) to help build shared understanding with a diverse set of stakeholders around water issues in the [Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta](#). The Delta provides water to 25 million people throughout California and spans three million acres of fertile land. It hosts 750 species of plants and wildlife, including more than 55 species of fish. It hosts half a million acres of farmland and is home to half a million people and 200,000 jobs. Most of the Delta is below sea level, protected by over a thousand miles of levees that need maintenance and upkeep.

Protecting this region, its inhabitants, their way of life, and the water that runs through it is a critical issue for all of California. We've been facilitating a conversation with leaders in the region to try and navigate this incredibly complex and contentious issue. It's been challenging and gratifying.

One of our critical design questions has been how to scale the progress that happens inside of the room with our participants. We knew that transparency and storytelling would be a critical part of the process. We hired [Joe Mathews](#), an accomplished journalist and expert on all things California, to be our storyteller. However, as we were designing the process, we still had many open questions about what the story would look like, and how it would be told.

Back in April, we held a design meeting at beautiful [Rush Ranch](#), just south of Suisun City in the Delta. Most of our team was there, including our client, Campbell Ingram of the Delta Conservancy, Joe (via Skype), and our partner in this process, [Jeff Conklin](#) of [CogNexus](#). While we were working, Jeff captured this clip of me and Kristin Cobble discussing storytelling possibilities:

I love this clip for a variety of reasons. It offers a peek into our design process, including some of Kristin's on-the-fly brilliance and wisdom. It shows us moving around the computer with Joe via Skype, so that he could participate remotely. Even though Campbell's not talking in this particular clip, it shows how we make the client partners in the design process. And, it's interesting to compare what we explored in our design conversations with what we actually ended up doing, which you can see on our [Delta Dialogues project website](#).

After all of our meetings, we debrief what we discussed. Kristin captured the first part of our debrief in this short clip:

Sadly, we don't do all of our debriefs out in nature like this. But we do try to connect with the places with which we're working, so that we have a more visceral sense of the work and why it matters.